

Teaching Interns' Perception on the Compatibility and Applicability of Teaching Theories Learnt at the University with the Actual Practice at School

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Abstract

An internship as a part of the curriculum for teacher education is necessary for the students as it could show them a real picture of their potential future career. This case study is aimed at analyzing teacher candidates' expectation from the university to make sure that they get the education they need (needs analysis). The result shows that there are still problems they encountered in the internship which are caused by the incompatibility and less-optimal applicability of the theories learnt. The problems mainly deal with applicable teaching techniques, ability and lack of facilities at the schools. It means that a process of correction and improvement are required to be done in order to match the curriculum with the professional needs.

Keywords: Internship, students' perception, needs analysis, curriculum

1. Background

As the world gets older, more sophisticated technology is developing and human's needs are changing and multiplying. All parts of life are inevitably changing, including education. Education is a very dynamic part of modern human life. Without accelerating with the development of technology, education cannot fulfill people's needs. Therefore, corrections and improvements are needed to be made in order for education to always be able to serve the people.

As a part of educational system, university has an important role in training professional teachers. It means that it needs to always update what is new in the technology and human behavior, and integrate it into the curriculum. By doing so, the future teachers would be able to face any problems dealing with modernization in their professions. However, the very fast-changing world sometimes makes it difficult for educators and education practitioners to cope with it. It often feels like there is no way to make sure that our education is up-to-date and compatible.

Real actions to accelerate with the development need to be done, nevertheless. Therefore, in a mission to always cope with the never-ending change, a research on the compatibility and applicability of teaching theories learnt at university with the actual practice at school is conducted. This research is aimed at analyzing teacher candidates' expectation from the institution to make sure that they get the education they need (needs analysis). The result of the research is expected to be a consideration for improving the curriculum, teaching materials, as well as teaching methods

and techniques. At the end of the day, the improvement is expected to enable the curriculum to link and match to the professional practice.

2. Underlying theories/Materials

a. Teaching Internship

Stretch and Harp (1991:67) in Hendrikse (2013:20) define an internship as a supervised off-campus working and learning experience which earns academic credit. They point out that internships allow students to apply the theories they learnt in the classroom in real situation. Meanwhile, Hanney (2005:105) proposes that undergoing internships is necessary for students to be able not only to experience practical work but also to develop professional skills such as communication, team working and problem solving. By completing internships, students would be ready for real professional life better than learning only the theories in the classroom.

According to the University of Wisconsin-Madison (www.wisc.edu), an internship is a Work-based Learning (WBL) experience that includes on-the-job training to prepare for a future career, with the emphasis on the development of skills and knowledge relating to the specific field of work. WBL also known as experiential learning is a learning principle that promotes learning outside the classroom for students through programs such as apprenticeships, cooperative education, internships, service learning, 'sandwich' placement, shadowing and externships (Linn, 1999:26-34 in Hendrikse, 2013:18). Internship as a manifestation of WBL gives students opportunity to look closely on what they might find later on their career after graduation.

In other words, the learning-by-doing principle which internships promote is crucial to prepare students to meet the qualifications of the job they choose in the future. Many students find out that the theoretical knowledge they acquire in traditional classrooms may not prepare them well to become successful professionals in a competitive new environment (Linn, Howard and Miller, 2004:3). Therefore, lack of experiential learning experiences might cause them unaware of the soft skills they need to have to be able to perform professionally in their career. As a result, they need longer time to adapt to the working environment, and it is not favorable for employers' side.

b. Principles of TEFL

There are three principles of teaching a language that a teacher should strive to apply in the classroom; they are cognitive principles, affective principles, and linguistic principles (Brown, 2001:54-71). The cognitive principles deal with automaticity, meaningful learning, the anticipation of reward, intrinsic motivation, and strategic investment. Affective principles care for language ego, self-confidence, risk-taking, and the language-culture connection. Meanwhile, linguistic principles are about the native language effect, *interlanguage*, and communicative competence.

Meaningful learning as a part of cognitive principles is among the theoretical knowledge a teacher candidate could learn in the classroom. Brown (2001:57) points out that meaningful learning can drive students toward better long term understanding of the materials than rote or isolated learning. Jonassen in Keskitallo (2011:19) states that a learning process is meaningful when it is correlated with things students could relate with. In other words, the more meaningful a learning process is, the more effective it would be.

Based on the principle of meaningful learning, the materials and activities in a lesson would be best understood and participated well by the students if they are integrated into something familiar for the learners. One of the ways is by integrating games into the lesson. According to Buhler in Djuanda (2007:14), playing triggers creativity. It also trains their character building. Solomon *et al.* (2006:4-5) indicates twelve pillars of universal characteristics. They are goal setting, self-awareness, appreciation of achievement, value on others, self-control, caring, being responsible, nationalism, lifelong learning, self-confidence, respect, and trustworthiness. Those twelve pillars are the ones to be worked out by the learners. Having these characteristics, someone would be an excellent member of the society who is likely to gain success. Therefore, character building is obviously a crucial thing to be integrated in lessons.

Meanwhile, a good teacher should also understand the anticipation of reward. Human beings are universally driven to act by the anticipation of some sort of reward – tangible or intangible, short term or long term (Brown, 2001:58). In order to motivate the students in learning, a teacher could use rewards. However, the application should be with cautions as nobody wants to get the side effects of misuse of rewards. The most powerful rewards are those that are intrinsically motivated within the learner (Brown, 2001:59).

Next, there is the affective principle (language ego, self-confidence, risk-taking, and the language-culture connection) according to Brown (2001:61-65). A teacher should keep in mind that everybody has language ego, including the students. The language ego might interfere with the new language's internalization process if the teacher ignore it or fail to apply the appropriate teaching techniques. Meanwhile, a successful learning process is the one that could encourage the students to be confident and take risks. It indicates the success of giving motivation and providing meaningful materials which connect the language being learnt and the culture.

The last set of principles is the linguistic principles which comprise the native language effect, *interlanguage*, and communicative competence (Brown, 2001:65-70). The goal of learning a foreign language is for the learners to be able to communicate well with the language. However, the process of the new language's internalization might be interfered by the learner's native language. Therefore, the learning instruction needs to

consider all components of communicative competence: the organizational, pragmatic, strategic, and psychomotor components (Brown, 2001:69).

c. Different Types of Students

There are several factors creating varieties of language learners' learning process; all of which a teacher needs to consider in designing the lessons. Among them are the learner's prior education, socio-economic position, content knowledge, and learning style (National Council of Teachers of English, 2008). Learning style is the theoretical knowledge teacher candidates could learn in university.

The theory of learning styles generally describes learners' sensory preferences, personality types, desired degree of generality, biological differences, and conditions beyond the stylistic comfort zones (Oxford, 2003). Sensory preferences refer to the physical, perceptual learning channels with which the student is the most comfortable. By having this knowledge, a teacher could adapt and vary the teaching techniques to accommodate every student's needs in learning.

There are six different sensory preferences that affect students' learning styles; they are visual, auditory, tactile, kinesthetic, analytic, and global (www.eslkidstuff.com). Visual learners learn best by looking. Auditory learners learn best by listening. Tactile learners learn physically by touching and manipulating objects. Kinesthetic learners learn physical by moving around. Analytic learners focus on the details of language. Global learners focus on the whole picture and do not care so much about specific details.

On the other hand, personality type is a construct based on the work of psychologist Carl Jung. It consists of four strands: extraverted vs. introverted, intuitive-random vs. sensing-sequential, thinking vs. feeling, and closure-oriented/judging vs. open/perceiving (Oxford, 2003). Enforcing time limit for the exercise can keep the extraverts' enthusiasm to a manageable level. Rotating the person-in-charge gives the introverts chances to participate more in the activities. Intuitive-random students like to create theories, whereas the sensing-sequential learners like facts rather than theories. Meanwhile, a teacher could help thinking learners show greater compassion to their feeling classmates and suggest that the feeling learners might tone down their emotional expression while working with thinking learners. Last but not least, a competent teacher would intentionally create working groups that include both judging and perceiving types of students. (Oxford, 2003)

3. Research Methodology

Twelve seventh-semester students of English Education Department of a State Islamic University in Bandung are given a set of questions in a questionnaire about their teaching internship experiences. The questions cover seven matters leading to their expectations and needs for the

university curriculum. However, three of the twelve respondents do not give comprehensive and straightforward answers so they have to be left out. At last, the answers from nine respondents, consisting of four male and five female interns are analyzed.

The seven topics covered in the questionnaire are: (1) the interns' expectation before the internship started (expectations); (2) the actual conditions at school (findings); (3) problems the interns face during the program and their solution; (4) the applicability of the theories learnt in university to the actual teaching practice; (5) the compatibility of the theories learnt in university with the actual teaching environment; and (6) what the interns expect to have learnt before the program starts (expected prerequisites).

4. Result

From the *intercorrelation* data in the questionnaire, it is revealed that four respondents' GPA is in the range of 3-3.49 points, while five others' is over 3.5 points. All of them are Sundanese, and plot to have their internships in schools at Cililin, Cihampelas, and Batujajar Subdistricts of Bandung Barat Regency. All of the schools are located in countryside, about thirty kilometers from the center of Bandung. This fact might affect the condition of the school students as well as the expectations of the interns.

a. Interns' Expectations

The analysis of the questionnaire shows that some of respondents' expectations are positive, and some others are negative. They are as follows:

Positive expectations

- 1) Teaching is fun and easy.
- 2) Students would be manageable.
- 3) Fast-learning students
- 4) Experienced and cooperative mentor
- 5) Sufficient learning facilities

Negative expectations

- 1) Teaching is difficult and not enjoyable.
- 2) Students might be smarter than the teacher.
- 3) Students' English is poor because of the school location (countryside).
- 4) Students are not manageable.
- 5) Difficult teaching materials
- 6) Too many tasks at school

b. Interns' Findings

Furthermore, those expectations are then match to the findings as follows:

Positive findings

- 1) Students were manageable and enthusiastic.
- 2) Comfortable and supportive teaching and learning environment
- 3) Teaching materials were not too difficult.
- 4) Experienced and cooperative mentor
- 5) Teaching is fun and not so difficult.

Negative findings

- 1) Lack of facilities
- 2) Students' English was poor.
- 3) Students were slow learners.
- 4) Unfamiliar teaching materials
- 5) Classroom management was tricky.
- 6) Unfamiliar lesson plan model

c. Interns' Problems and Solutions

On the other hand, those expectations and findings also lead to some challenges they face during the internship. The challenges are: (1) lack of facilities (including English books); (2) making lesson plans; (3) time management; (4) coping with nervousness; (5) classroom management; and (6) slow-learning and low-motivated students. Some respondents provide solutions to those problems such as preparing handout before teaching to compromise with the lack of facilities. Some of them consult to the internet and using available lesson plans at school to deal with problems in making lesson plans. They also try their hardest to have self-management so they could overcome their own nervousness in dealing with the students. For the classroom management, some of them cooperate with the mentor to manage the students and applying punishment and rewards. They also try to employ creative and interesting teaching techniques such as games and interesting media such as video.

d. Applicability and compatibility of the Teaching Theories Learnt

Meanwhile, there are some surprising findings of the applicability and compatibility of the teaching theories learnt at university. Most respondents point out that pedagogical subjects such as microteaching, TEFL methodology, ELT Media, and Educational Psychology are applicable for teaching process. They also state that subjects of English skills and components are applicable as the teaching materials. However, there is an incompatibility found which is about the curriculum being taught. In university, respondents learn how to make lesson plans for the 2013 curriculum. However, it is not the one they have to use at schools. All of the practice schools still use the 2006 school-based curriculum. It means that the lesson plans used are different.

e. Expected Prerequisites

From all the above description, respondents finally conclude several things that they expect to have learnt before the internship starts. They are:

- 1) More knowledge of teaching specific educational levels
- 2) More practical knowledge of how to be a fun teacher and how to teach effectively
- 3) More practical knowledge of classroom management
- 4) More practical, up-to-date and actual teaching methods and techniques
- 5) How to make lesson plans of different curriculum

5. Discussion

The various expectations shown by the respondents are likely to be affected by their attitude towards teaching and the profession of a teacher, their confidence as teacher candidates, their learning attitudes, their experience as school students, and their perception of the area where the schools are located. A confident teacher candidate must have optimism toward their internship. A good student in university tends to be more prepared with the teaching materials they may have to use. Also, an intern who has a prior knowledge about the school might have had an image or an accurate expectation of the actual condition there.

Furthermore, from the answers, it turns out that some of the expectations match the findings, and some others are not. Most respondents expected their mentor (English teachers in the schools) to be cooperative and professional, and that is what they exactly find. However, some positive expectations eventually mismatch the real condition, and the other way around. Respondents who used to think that the school students would be easy to interact and cooperate with turn out to have classroom management problems. Meanwhile, respondents who thought that teaching is difficult and not enjoyable turn out to enjoy their role as teachers.

In dealing with the problems found during the internships, they propose several ideas as mentioned in the previous section. The point about game is actually a very good idea. However, some of those solutions seem to be indiscreet as they may have some side effects on the students. One of the respondents mentions that to draw and keep the students' attention, she gives them tangible rewards such as sweets and chocolate. In contrast, according to Harmer (2003) tangible rewards might result in addiction could lead to demotivation of the students. It is very likely that they are not willing to participate in a learning activity if there is no reward. Intangible rewards such as compliment is much better as it could boost students' intrinsic learning motivation.

On the other hand, from the list of the above expected prerequisites, it could be concluded that the teaching theories taught at university are too general. There is too little emphasis on how to teach different educational levels and grades. English education department graduates might be expected to become senior and junior high school teachers, but some of them eventually work as EYL teachers at elementary schools or English courses. Besides, senior high school students differ quite greatly from junior high school students in terms of behavior, maturity, and expectation. One cannot treat them the same way. It means that there are different ways of teaching them. Unfortunately, this is never emphasized in the teacher training curriculum. They are only distinguished from young learners. This is something that needs to be changed in order to improve the quality of English teachers.

Moreover, the list of expected prerequisites also shows that the teaching theories taught at university are somewhat old-fashioned, especially about teaching techniques and methods. It is true that a successful teacher is the one who always strives to be creative. However, as

a teacher training institution, the university needs to load its curriculum with the latest updates of teaching techniques and methods. Therefore, the teacher candidates would be more prepared in getting in to the professional life, as well as getting used to think and do creatively.

Nonetheless, no matter how up-to-date a curriculum might be, it might not set aside the fact that not all schools are familiar with the newest trend. By considering this, problems the interns face dealing with different type of lesson plans they learn with the one they use would not occur. Once again, the goal of the education is to match with the people's needs.

Last but not least is about the expectation to have knowledge to be fun teacher and teach effectively and how to manage the class. They are all practical things a teacher must master to be successful in teaching. Without the knowledge, a teacher could not help students understand the materials, let alone touch their heart and build their character, while this is the point of being a teacher. Without the knowledge, a teacher might feel overwhelmed by the various characteristics of the students and eventually fail to perform well in front of them.

6. Conclusion

The result of the research show that there are still problems faced by the interns, which root from the incompatibility and less-applicability of the theories learnt in the classroom. Failing in conveying the materials and making students understand as well as managing the class are the biggest failure yet the most likely thing to happen to an inexperienced teacher. So, it is the university's responsibility to prevent them from making such failure. One of the ways is by giving the teacher candidates maximum exposure to real teaching conditions by having school observation at least once a month. Inviting professional teachers to be guest speakers in class could also help as they are the practitioners so they could give real description of what actually happens in our education. At last, the success of a teaching process is in the hands of the teachers, so they have to be creative. It is very important to train the teacher candidates' critical and creative thinking in class. When they get used to thinking critically and creatively, they would automatically employ it when they become professional teachers in the future. Therefore, university curriculum must be design to enable the students to become critical thinkers and creative future teachers.

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